



MID shares local water concerns with top state officials

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SACRAMENTO, CA – Merced Irrigation District shared the community’s local water challenges with top officials in Sacramento this week.

MID General Manager John Sweigard joined a dozen other state water experts on Tuesday to testify on California’s current dry conditions. Specifically, he discussed the unique challenges faced by MID growers during a joint meeting of the California Water Commission and the State Board of Food and Agriculture.

“This was an excellent opportunity to discuss the water challenges our local community faces with those who have the ability to influence water policy in Sacramento,” said Sweigard.

Among those invited to testify were Mark Cowin, Director of the Department of Water Resources; Randy Record, Chair of the Association of California Water Agencies; and Mike Wade, Executive Director of the California Farm Water Coalition.

During his testimony, MID’s Sweigard discussed ongoing regulatory challenges affecting the Merced River. The State Water Resources Control Board is currently considering plans to increase the flows down the river, leaving less in storage for irrigation and groundwater recharges in eastern Merced County.

Sweigard said there is no comprehensive approach to addressing threatened salmon, and multiple agencies have different plans. He also said that while agriculture water users must report on their beneficial use of water, no report or benefit analysis is required by government agencies with an eye on the environment.

“With no agency accountability, there will be no improvements for salmon, and that means our water supplies will continue to be threatened,” he said.

Sweigard said that ocean conditions, salmon-harvest policy, non-native sport fish and loss of floodplain habitat around the San Joaquin Delta have harmed fish.

Those issues are well outside the bounds of MID, said Sweigard. They should be addressed rather than simply demanding MID and other east side irrigation districts release more water to the Delta.

“We cannot continue to perform the same failed actions over and over,” he said. “Not only is it doomed for failure, it has real world consequences for the people who live and work in the San Joaquin Valley.”

Nine of the State’s major reservoirs are below historic average levels, and six of these are below 50 percent total capacity.

MID receives its water from Lake McClure, owned and operated by the District. The lake has limited storage capacity. Although it was nearly full in 2011, it is currently at 34 percent capacity.

Tuesday’s meeting provided a forum for agricultural stakeholders, water representatives, and government officials to discuss California’s water situation and make recommendations to the governor and other state water leaders.

Officials discussed the possibility of another dry season in 2014. The need to address falling groundwater supplies, and expedite water transfers were among the numerous issues discussed.

Long before the current two-year drought, MID began exploring the possibility of increasing its storage on Lake McClure. It has proposed making adjustments to its infrastructure, allowing the District to capture an additional 70,000 acre feet of water in wet years for use in dry years.

Before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission can review such a proposal, it would need Congressional approval. MID, working with local members of Congress, has introduced federal legislation to provide it.

In 2012, H.R. 2578 was passed out of the House of Representatives, but was not taken up by the U.S. Senate. Currently, H.R. 934 is awaiting action by the House of Representatives. Both bills have had bipartisan support from Valley lawmakers.

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